

# Notes on Romans 9—12

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## Chapter nine

From the beginning of his letter to Rome, Paul had the world in view. Christ was Lord; he himself was headed for Rome; the whole world was held accountable to God; justification would be given to all who believed; grace was reigning over all humanity; the creation would be set free from its bondage; and in all this great creation, nothing could separate believers from the love of God. Now, Paul showed how to see this world in which the electing and merciful word of God was at work.

**9:1-5** The great gifts of God to Israel, which included himself, now as a grateful recipient, had focussed Paul's affections on his people. The thought of them being unresponsive gave him great sorrow.

**9:6-13** But it did not occur to him that God's electing word had failed. Election was not a racial privilege for Israel but a dynamic word that persistently brought people to know God's mercy, shaping them into people of faith. The human contribution to this was nil.

**9:14-23** It was impossible to get behind the mercy of God. God had mercy according to his own dictates.

**9:24-33** This mercy reached to Gentiles as also to Jews. He had made people his own that had not belonged to him and this mercy did not apply to people just because they could claim lineage (which would put control in human hands). So mercy reached to some, though they had not been given the law and not sought to establish their own righteousness, as Israel had.

## Prayer

Lord, you have revealed yourself in going out to show mercy. I cannot enquire why this may have been so for anyone, or for me, or why it may not have been so for someone else. Father, shake from me all remaining attempts to be something apart from you that I may have the true righteousness which is your gift to those who trust you. Amen.

## Chapter ten

**10:1-4** Israel's zeal was misguided. Their eyes had been on themselves being righteous rather than God, whose righteousness was full of mercy, and who would have led them directly to Jesus Christ who was the goal of the law.

**10:5-13** Paul showed from the Old Testament that the gift of righteousness always came by God's word—which was near and not far away. This word was now Jesus Christ who had come from the heights and been raised from the depths. Paul said that we are to call him Lord (as God), believing God has raised him from the dead. For this alone, we are justified by God, whoever we are.

**10:14-21** Israel had every opportunity to believe in God. They have heard via a preacher who was sent. All this happened in Isaiah's day, but Israel would not believe. Now, it is the word of Christ (through the prophet, or now, through the evangelist) that leads to faith, and this word has always been going out. But Israel had been ignorant, unseeking and obstinate and had to be aroused by pagans to make them jealous for their covenantal blessings. In fact, Israel found God when they had not sought him, and even then, God's patience seemed to be unrewarded.

### Prayer

Father of Israel, and of Jesus Christ, you have always been speaking and calling us to trust in you. Our faith in you has always been tardy. But the sheer grace of your promise shines through all this rebellion. Father, I have heard the word of Christ in the gospel and know that this is your Word. I believe you have raised Christ for our justification and that I am saved. Thanks be to God. May the truth of you as God be known in all places. Amen.

### Chapter eleven

Paul had abounding confidence in the patient mercy of God for Israel, i.e. God's election of Israel. Precedents from their history, figures of speech from their sacrificial system, all encouraged him to believe (against all appearance to the contrary) that historic Israel remained God's people. By this he concluded that God would still glorify himself in Israel and that he would graft them back into His true people.

**11:1-10** What happened to Israel is important to the whole people of God. If they can be rejected, so can I. Paul referred to himself in the present. Then to Elijah in the past, who surmised under pressure, that he must be the only true Israelite left. No! said God. Now too, there is a remnant chosen by grace, not by works. These works must be its seeking earnestly (v. 7) but wrongfully, only to be given a spirit of stupor just as Israel's eyes were closed to all God's providences.

**11:11-16** But Paul, himself renewed, saw that Israel's stubbornness was not final. He had seen many Gentiles become Christians through his turning from Jewish proclamation to Gentile proclamation. He saw the 'fruitfulness' (in the purpose of God) of Israel's stubbornness. What then of their turning back to God? The kingdom of God is all about the performing of mercy as promised (Luke 1:72). Everything serves this great purpose. Paul's work among Gentiles actually had the Jews in view through creating jealousy.

His assurance that this was so was Israel's practice of devoting part of the bread mixture to God, sanctifying the whole. Some Jews had trusted in Christ; this sanctified the rest. The root probably means the patriarchs, sanctifying all who had descended from them (so v. 29).

**11:17-24** Election is meant to encourage us, not make us presumptuous. We benefit through being grafted into this amazing covenant stock. But the covenant leads to faith. Have faith! Do not suffer the fate of not believing! God's covenant relation with Israel (and with the world) is both kind and severe. All that is required is that we remain in his kindness. This is true of Israel as of us. In fact, it would be more natural for Israel to be grafted in than for Gentiles.

**11:25-32** Paul saw God hardening Israel's heart as bringing salvation to Gentiles rather than as bringing a punishment on Jews. Everything that God does is under his mercy. In the end, all God's covenant people (however defined) will be saved including those presently hardened, because it is all of mercy. Paul's assurance of this was promises to Isaiah and Jeremiah (Isa. 59:20-21; Jer. 31:33-34).

Israel could be God's enemy and his beloved at the same time. Again, Paul did not say Israel was cut off for its sins, but for God's saving purpose for Gentiles. They had become disobedient so that Gentiles may receive mercy, and this, in turn, so mercy could flow back to Jews. The Biblical record had always borne witness to human sinfulness so consigning us all to sin (3:19), but so that mercy may be the rule for all people.

We may ask what manner of God we have. Paul knew he had been dwarfed by the magnitude of what he had discovered about God's administration and judgement of the world. He knew that God owed no one anything. He had already given everything to us. His knowledge of his Creator had come via mercy.

## Prayer

'To God be the glory. Great things he has done.' We thank you Father that everything in your Scripture and everything in our own history is so we will know you as the God of mercy. We are in awe of you because we know your severity as well. Nothing escapes your great purpose in Christ. Lord, we rest in your kindness. We pray, too, for those who still oppose you; some who have been tutored well in your covenant truth. Have mercy on them. Through the revelation of your mercy, we have hope for them too. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

## Chapter twelve

In chapters 9-11 Paul described the gospel among the disobedient (chapters 9-11), and now, the gospel among the obedient. We became obedient through the gospel (6:17), and are maintained in this by the mercies of God, and by the exhortations Paul gives here which describe living in mercy.

**12:1-8** The sacrifice of our selves is living because we are renewed by the Holy Spirit, holy not because we offer it to God but because it is what we now have to offer, and acceptable because God is pleased to receive us and our offering for the sake of Christ.

Our place in life and in faith is assigned to us. We cannot go beyond this and need not go beyond this in order to be an acceptable offering to God. Each person can know the will of God. The diversity here is not the diversity of human purposes and

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intention but the diversity of God's will. With these gifts we do not serve ourselves, or even each other first of all, but God who, in us, gives freely to all.

**12:9-21** The list portrays an ideal society, but this is not utopia. It is the work of mercy, performed by Christ.

It starts with genuine love, not just knowledge of good and evil but hatred of evil and clinging to good. What God reveals is so we may do it. It continues with family and brotherly love including preference of others above oneself. Then comes Christ directed diligence and fervour, and hope and patience and prayer, and aid for saints and strangers.

Paul continued to describe a life rich in possibility because it was the overflowing of Christ's victory in our common life lived for the benefit of others, whether they be friends or enemies, joyful or sad, great or lowly.

Avenging ourselves can be left to God. For ourselves, we may overcome evil with good. The world may either oppose or appease its enemies; we have the means to bless them.

### **Prayer**

Truly Father, you have reconciled us to yourself. Our life is now surrounded with mercy and need not be malformed by the many other events amongst which we have lived and must live. Grant us grace Father, to let go of all resentment, jealousy and fear, and live by the certainty of your blessing on our lives and the hope of your blessing on others, through Christ who keeps us in this hope by his intercession. Amen.